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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENGDU 000094

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SUBJECT: DEMOLITION OF HOUSING CONTINUING AT LARGE TIBETAN MONASTERY  
IN EFFORT TO REDUCE NUMBER OF MONKS

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CLASSIFIED BY: Kathryn Pongonis, Acting Consul General, United  
States Consulate, Chengdu.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A reincarnate lama from one of Sichuan's largest and fastest growing Tibetan Buddhist monasteries said local authorities are under orders to control and reduce the number of monks and nuns there. The monastery currently houses 5,000 monks and 3,000 nuns, and local work teams are stepping up efforts to destroy monastic dwellings to control and reduce the population, focusing on "deporting" monks and nuns from outside the local area. Hundreds of young monks and nuns under the age of 18 reside and are educated in the monastery, but must hide during official inspections. The reincarnate stated that the Democratic Management Committee of the monastery is an "empty organization" maintained only "for the sake of officials" and does not routinely carry out required "patriotic" education. End Summary.

#### Sichuan Authorities Destroy Monks' Homes

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¶2. (C) Yega (one name) (strictly protect), a reincarnate lama (Rinpoche) from Yachen Monastery, one of Sichuan's largest and fastest growing, told Poloff during a private April 4 meeting in Chengdu that local authorities continue to try to reduce the size of his monastery, which currently houses 5,000 monks and 3,000 nuns. (Note: Government attempts to reduce the size of Yachen have been going on since at least 2001. End Note.) In particular, the Palyul County Party Committee, United Front Work Department and Religious Affairs Bureau are acting under Prefecture-level orders to destroy monks' and nuns' dwellings in order to try to control a large and growing monastic population. Yega Rinpoche said that since 2000, approximately 2,300 monastic homes and meditation houses have been destroyed by the county government. In 2005 about 1,500 houses were destroyed, and an additional 230 houses were knocked down in 2006. Ganzi Prefecture's official Chinese website touted these actions as "accomplishments" in religious management in 2005. This year, Yega Rinpoche related, the local government has instituted a "plan" and is requiring Yachen Monastery to destroy more houses, build roads, number and label all monastic houses, and register monks and nuns (Comment: These actions are similar to those taken at Serthar Buddhist encampment in Sichuan in 2002, which at its height grew to 9,000 adherents. End comment.)

¶3. (C) Yega Rinpoche commented that the government finds it difficult to control monks and nuns from coming to the

monastery, but hopes to control the flow by placing limits on construction of monastic houses. In order to accomplish this goal, the government has drawn a line around the monastery, and monastic leaders have been told "to stay within the official line and not to expend the monastery outside of it." Yega Rinpoche said it is nearly impossible to comply with this order because the monastic population is growing and there is no place to build meditation houses for newcomers.

#### Large Population Draws Attention

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14. (C) In answer to Congenoff's question, Yega Rinpoche said he thinks Yachen Monastery has drawn government attention because of its large monastic population as well as the fact that the majority of monks and nuns come from outside Palyul County. There are currently 5,000 monks and 3,000 nuns, but Yega Rinpoche acknowledged the Monastery usually tells the government there are only 5,000 total. The vast majority of these monks and nuns are unregistered, or have no official legal permission from the government to reside there. This year, according to Yega Rinpoche, the government will require that 1,000 monks and nuns officially register. He noted that no more than 1,000 monks would be permitted to register and the remainder would have no official legal status.

#### "Deportation" of Outside Monks

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15. (C) Yega Rinpoche said that only 80 monks were from Palyul County and that the government has in the past focused on "deporting" the non-local monks and nuns from the monastery. He pointed out that in 2001 and 2002, over 30 trucks came to transport monks and nuns back to their original places of origin. Yega Rinpoche said monks and nuns who were removed now live in Ganzi County in Yushul Prefecture and in Chamdo Prefecture. The 200 reincarnate lamas that reside in Yachen were not targeted for removal, according to Yega Rinpoche. Of these 200 lamas, only two, himself and Abott Achu Rinpoche, have official registration certificates from the government.

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16. (C) In addition to Tibetan Buddhist monks from outside of Palyul County, there are also a good number of Han Chinese Buddhists who reside in Yachen. Yega Rinpoche noted the government prohibition on establishment of contacts between Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism, but said Chinese Buddhist adherents still come to the monastery because it is known for strong meditational practices.

#### Education of Young Monks and Nuns

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17. (C) There are currently approximately 300 monks and nuns under 18 years old who reside in the monastery, but their presence is not permitted by local officials, Yega stated. During official investigations, monastery leaders instruct these young people to hide. The monastery sought approval for construction and establishment of a school for these young people, but were refused official permission. Yega said the monks decided to build a simple house and now train the young monks and nuns secretly.

#### Democratic Management Committee "In Name Only"

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18. (C) Yega Rinpoche is a member of the Ganzi Prefecture People's Party Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and Director of the monastery's Democratic Management Committee (DMC). When asked about the structure and tasks of the DMC, Yega Rinpoche stated the DMC at Yachen was an "empty organization" that existed "in name only." He added that the monastery has instructions from the prefecture level to have such a committee, so they maintained the name "for the sake of the officials." When asked if the monastery carried out "patriotic" or political education, Yega Rinpoche responded that it was a requirement, but that the monastery did not require attendance on a regular basis outside of official inspections.

¶9. (C) Yega Rinpoche said it was very hard to have a real DMC, or to be a real DMC director because the official rules and regulations violated Buddhist principles. He also acknowledged it was extremely difficult for him to be a member of the CPPCC, but that he had to keep the membership for the good of the monastery. At the same time, Yega Rinpoche emphasized that he would never give up his religious faith for his political affiliations, saying, "faith is in one's heart and mind, and cannot be easily removed." He said, for example, "keeping a photograph of the Dalai Lama is illegal, so we always take them down for official inspections, and put them back up after the officials are gone."

Thankful for United States Government Support

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¶10. (C) Yega Rinpoche said he was surprised the United States Government had heard of the limits on monastic populations and destruction of dwellings in Yachen Monastery. He added that he had heard the U.S. government was doing a lot for the people of Tibet. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of continued outside support and thanked us for our work.

BOUGHNER